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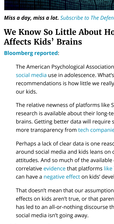
We Know So Little About How Social Media Affects Kids' Brains + More

The Defender's Big Brother NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to governments' abuse of power, including attacks on democracy, civil liberties and use of mass surveillance. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.

By The Defender Staff



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We Know So Little About How Social Media Affects Kids' Brains

Bloomberg reported:

The American Psychological Association has issued its first advisory on social media use in adolescence. What's most striking is its data-based recommendations is how little we really know about how social media affect our kids.

The relative newness of platforms like Snapchat and TikTok means little research is available about their long-term effects on teen and tween brains. Getting better data will require significant funding — and much more transparency from tech companies.

Perhaps a lack of clear data is one reason that so much of the conversation around social media and kids leans on our personal experiences and attitudes. And so much of the available data is murky: There's plenty of correlative evidence that platforms like TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram can have a negative effect on kids' development, but very little causal data.

That doesn't mean that our assumptions about social media's deleterious effects on kids aren't true, or that parents don't have cause to worry. But it has led to an all-or-nothing discourse that often ignores the reality that social media isn't going away.

Biden Revokes COVID Travel, Federal Employee Vaccine Requirements

Reuters reported:

President Joe Biden on Tuesday revoked requirements that most international visitors to the United States be vaccinated against COVID-19 as well as similar rules for federal employees and contractors.

Biden's orders take effect at 12:01 a.m. ET May 12 with the expiration of the U.S. COVID public health emergency. The Biden administration's rules imposed in September 2021 requiring about 3.5 million federal employees and contractors to be vaccinated or face firing or disciplinary action have not been enforced for over a year after a court injunction, according to the White House announced the plan last week to end the last of the extraordinary public health restrictions first adopted in 2020 that at one point barred most of the world's population from entering the United States.

The Homeland Security Department will also no longer require non-U.S. travelers entering the United States via land ports of entry and ferries to be vaccinated against COVID-19 and provide proof upon request.

Biden Admin Creates New Disinformation Office to Oversee the Rest

ZeroHedge reported:

With the Biden administration elevating disinformation to a national security threat, as codified in its first-of-its-kind National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, published in June 2021, new government (and non-government) offices dedicated to fighting foreign disinformation are cropping up everywhere.

To oversee organizations like the Pentagon's new Influence and Perception Management Office and at least four organizations inside the Department of Homeland Security alone, the Director of National Intelligence has created a new office — the Foreign Malign Influence Center, The Intercept reports.

Established on September 23 of last year after Congress provisioned funding, the FMIC was only announced publicly after The Intercept inquired. The group, operating under the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), "enjoys the unique authority to marshal support from all elements of the U.S. intelligence community to monitor and combat foreign influence efforts such as disinformation campaigns," according to the report.

That said, it isn't just monitoring foreign threats ... as the FMIC is also authorized to monitor "the public opinion within the United States."

"It's the basic rhetorical trick of the censorship age: raise a fuss about a foreign threat, using it as a battering ram to get everyone from Congress to the tech companies to submit to increased regulation and surveillance," Twitter Files journalist Matt Taibbi wrote Friday. "Then, slowly, adjust your aim to domestic targets."

Docs Warn About AI's 'Existential Threat to Humanity'

Axios reported:

Artificial intelligence poses "an existential threat to humanity" akin to nuclear weapons in the 1980s and should be reined in until it can be properly regulated, an international group of doctors and public health experts warned Tuesday in BMJ Global Health.

What they're saying: "With exponential growth in AI research and development, the window of opportunity to avoid serious and potentially existential harms is closing," wrote the authors, among them experts from the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and the International Institute for Global Health.

The big picture: The warning comes amid increasing calls for improved oversight of artificial intelligence from the likes of Geoffrey Hinton, the so-called godfather of AI, who announced he was quitting Google over his worries about threats from machine learning, PBS reports.

Zoom in: The physicians and public health experts say the healthcare community needs to sound the alarm "even as parts of our community espouse the benefits of AI in the fields of healthcare and medicine."

They cite AI's ability to rapidly analyze sets of data could be misused for surveillance and information campaigns to "further undermine democracy by causing a general breakdown in trust or by driving social division and conflict, with ensuing public health impacts."

Ex-Fox News Host Tucker Carlson Launching New Show on Twitter

New York Daily News reported:

Former Fox News host Tucker Carlson plans to launch a "new version" of his show on Twitter. Carlson announced the news in a three-minute video posted on the social media platform on Tuesday.

"Speech is the fundamental prerequisite for democracy. That's why it's enshrined in the first of our Constitutional amendments," Carlson says in the video. "There aren't many platforms left that allow free speech. The last big one remaining in the world — the only one — is Twitter, where we are now."

Twitter CEO Elon Musk took to his platform Tuesday evening to respond to Carlson's announcement and confirm that Twitter did not make any sort of deal for the new show.

Carlson, 53, parted ways with Fox News in April but remains under contract until January 2025. According to reports, Carlson will forfeit $25 million in severance from the network to start the new show. Earlier Tuesday, Carlson's lawyer accused Fox News of fraud and breach of contract, according to Axios.

Calif. Top Court Reluctant to Hold Employers Liable for COVID Infections

Reuters reported:

Judges on California's top state court on Tuesday said they were concerned that allowing employers to be sued when workers who contracted COVID-19 spread it to members of their households would unleash "an avalanche of litigation" against businesses.

The seven-member California Supreme Court heard oral arguments in San Francisco over whether woodworking company Victory Woodworks Inc could be held liable for negligence by Cortiy Kucielnia, an employee's wife who says she became seriously ill when her husband contracted COVID at work in the early days of the pandemic in 2020 and passed it to her.

Even with the COVID global health emergency officially over, the court's ruling in the case could have major implications for California businesses. It will apply to lawsuits that are currently pending, any new cases that fall within California's two-year window to file negligence lawsuits, and potentially future claims involving other infectious diseases.

Clearview Fined Again in France for Failing to Comply With Privacy Orders

TechCrunch reported:

Clearview AI, the U.S. startup that's attracted notoriety in recent years for a massive privacy violation after it scraped selfies off the Internet and used people's data to build a facial recognition tool it pitches to law enforcement and others, has been hit with another fine in France over non-cooperation with the data protection regulator.

The overdue penalty payment of €5.2M has been issued by the French regulator, the CNIL — on top of a €20M sanction it slapped the company with last year for breaching regional privacy rules.

The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) sets out conditions for processing personal data lawfully. Clearview has been found to have breached a number of requirements set out in law — by France's CNIL and several other regional data protection authorities, including authorities in the U.K., Italy and Greece, garnering several tens of millions in total fines to date.

Whether Clearview will ever pay any of these fines remains an open question, since the U.S.-based company has not been cooperating with EU regulators.

CEO of ChatGPT Maker OpenAI to Testify to Congress

The Washington Post reported:

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman will testify to Congress for the first time next week, the latest sign that policymakers in Washington are ratcheting up scrutiny of artificial intelligence as the technology booms in Silicon Valley.

Altman, whose company is behind the AI-driven chatbot ChatGPT, will appear Tuesday before a Senate panel to discuss efforts to keep AI in check — efforts that include potential legislation under consideration on Capitol Hill.

The hearing comes as lawmakers and federal officials grapple with how to tackle the surging popularity of generative AI tools like ChatGPT, which pull information from massive data sets to generate words, images and sounds, including conversational responses to users' queries.

The product's rapid deployment has triggered an AI arms race in the tech industry and raised alarm among some AI ethicists and public officials, who fear the technology's potential to spread misinformation, replace jobs or otherwise cause significant harm to users.

MEPs to Vote on Proposed Ban on 'Big Brother' AI Facial Recognition on Streets

The Guardian reported:

Moves to ban live "Big Brother" real-time facial recognition technology from being deployed across the streets of the EU or by border officials will be tested in a key vote at the European parliament on Thursday.

The amendment is part of a package of proposals for the world's first artificial intelligence laws, which could result in firms being fined up to €10m (£8.7m) or removed from trading within the EU for breaches of the rules.

But the ban, contained in a first to be voted on in parliament on Thursday, is expected to be challenged by a group of center-right MEPs on the grounds that biometric scanning should be deployed to combat serious crimes such as terrorism.

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